CANDIES, GLOBALIZATION AND KINDERGARTENS

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ABSTRACT

Based on a small study that took place in some kindergartens, this text aims to demonstrate that in in spite of an increasing globalization, which is reflected in the change in the habits and lifestyle of the children, they do not reveal a different interpretation or multicultural reality. The audiovisual media communicates a complex and diverse cultural reality, but the children exposed to these messages do not assimilate it naturally. The standard remains a monolithic cultural and racial. The results from the painting of a picture with a doll by the young children revealed almost 100% associations of the paintings were connected with the "white" race (Caucasian). However, there are some facts that can justify this result: the reality of a city with little multicultural landscape; an aging population with very traditional patterns of behavior; weak economic ability of the population, which implies little mobility; weak economic bases which are reflected in the low attractiveness of the region to external populations.

KEY-WORDS: Globalization; Kindergarten; Multicultural education.

1. INTRODUCTION

I bought some chocolates to give my daughters. When the shopkeeper put them in the bag, she added two small postcards that I didn't pay much attention to. After a while, I picked one of them up and realized it was a coloring drawing. Back home I gave the bag with the postcards and the chocolates to my girls. When they saw them they called my attention to one of the postcards, which featured a little black girl running through the woods. This image was the same of the one I had seen previously, but instead of blank it was already colored. I have to admit that at first I was surprised with the fact that the little girl was black. When I saw the blank postcard it didn't occur to me that the girl would be anything but white. I was less than happy with my attitude! I do not like "pitfalls" that can lead me to positions contrary to my principles and values. It is just as logical for the character to be black as it would to be white or yellow. I like people, not their color or appearance. It then occurred to me to do this little game with colleagues and friends, white and black. The result was identical to mine; apparently we are still bound by "pre-concepts" and stereotypes. On such a globalized western society, where the color of one's skin draws increasingly less attention, it looks contradictory the "lack of imagination" revealed by this game of mine. Therefore, the idea of doing this same experiment with pre-school children. With the help of kindergarten teachers, cards were given to the kids and the results were similar to the ones with adults. The reasons for this are various, but certainly are related with the marginal position of the city in relation to the country's main city centers, were innovation occurs and the contact with innovations are trivial.

2. BRIEF THEORETICAL REFLECTION

One of the key-words from the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st is Globalization. Just like with other terms at are used to the point of exhaustion, they become so common and trivial that they end up losing meaning. However, the indiscriminate use of words or expressions corresponds, in general, to changes in society, more or less profound and more or less permanent. The common citizen, even if unable to define the terms accurately, recognizes that they are related to variations in daily life, that is, he can capture the sense of change and, although superficially, the change correspondent to the term.

In the case of Globalization, the current concept is a little different from the one Portuguese people started using 5 centuries ago. It is undeniable that the "Discoveries" (both Portuguese, as from the Kingdom of Castile and Leon – Spain) were the beginning of globalization. The world not only became "wider" but also more multicultural and its several parts more interconnected. The present news is perhaps the speed of interdependence between spaces, organizations, countries and regions, even of small villages lost is the immensity of the more than 510 000 000 Km² of our planet. This reality, contrary to the 1st phase of globalization, "shrinks" the world – we can communicate or have access to information at the speed of light (or sometimes a little slower, depending on the skills of the user of the new technologies and the material at his disposal). An alteration in the perception of the space took place in the so called western societies; besides the new technologies and means of communication allowing us to travel and get to know other realities, close or distant, the evolution of the means of transportation, and generalized access to them to the populations, made us become global citizens.

One of the most evident demonstrations of this ability to know and travel is reflected in tourism. Looking at Portugal's example, the countries of origin of the tourists who spend the most in our country had, just a few years ago, little significance due to the distance and, mainly, the ignorance and difficulty of travel - China, Angola, Brazil and Russia. For Portugal they are recent source markets. This increase is due to a large number of factors that go beyond the scope of this text. However, the obvious conclusion is related to the knowledge of the country as a touristic destination and the ease of travel. These two factors are the mark of the present globalization. Western countries have global citizens; the improvement of the life quality and available incomes, accompanied by the popularization of means and technologies of communication, allow the world to be ever closer and subject to direct contact and in loco knowledge, for these populations. Benko (2000; p 2) tends to define "internationalization" (as he prefers to call it) as "(…) the increasing integration of the different parts of the world, under the effect of the acceleration of exchanges, the boost in new technologies of information and communication, means of transport, etc." Notwithstanding this definition, the author safeguards the existence of different perspectives on globalization according to each social science; globalization/ internationalization induces am integration process where political boundaries and strong customs' control put obstacles to the free movement of people, goods and capital. For this geographer "the internationalization is the 'glocation' or the amplified articulation of local territories with the world economy." (Benko, 2000, p. 5)

Ease of accessibility allows people to mingle and acculturate. Nations and states are not monolithic with respect to creeds, races or religions.

The French of Maghreb descent or originated from the Iberian Peninsula are as European as third generation Asian Norwegian. Globalization has also changed the concept of nation-state.

The modern nation-state is in cultural identity crisis, but in growth relatively to the birth of new blended cultures, postmodern, unmatched in the past and with no certainties of affirmation in the future.

Postmodernism is uncertainty, but also the assertion of new people, tribes or groups united by identity factors, different from the State resultant from the Peace of Westphalia.

Adults, with more or less resistance to change, are transforming their way of being, thinking and feeling the reality. But for children who never knew a different reality than the present one, diversity should be common (is it?).

On a child's everyday life, in a western country, television as well as computers with internet access take her to distant realities where difference is always present. It is, in fact, such a constant that on a Japanese cartoon, the characters are not perceived as Asian. Even Disney, in a more recent movie, presented a black princess (having already introduced a "native American" [Pocahontas] and an Asian one [Mulan]). As far as it is known, this fact called out the adults' attention much more than that of children. In kindergarten it is normal to see kids of various colors and ethnicities. Children don't give emphasis to the differences; they simply play, learn and have fun without the notion of "difference" becoming relevant.

Of course this last perspective is somewhat innocent and naïve; children often don't act this way for the simple reason that an adult has mentioned and pointed out the outside difference and sometimes gone far beyond just the "appearance"

aspect. Even in societies with marked multiculturalism, there are segregations and differentiations based on culture, color of the skin or ethnicity.

In a society such as the United States of America, marked by a myriad of cultures, creeds, religions, races, ethnicities and miscegenation, there are marked divisions in the most ordinary events of everyday life. Politicians make different speeches for African-American, Latin-American and other groups distinguished by specific beliefs or lifestyles. Are the aspirations of Latinos different from those of WASP? Obviously, they are; the first are discriminated by the second and therefore aspire to equality of opportunities in the various aspects of their lives.

Despite socio-spatial segregation, society is pluricultural and multicultural and differences are always artificial and based on prejudices or misconceptions. What we present on this study is the vision of kindergarten children from Portalegre. Portalegre is a city in the interior of Portugal, located on one of its most disfavored regions, Alentejo. The consequence of this idiosyncrasy and isolation relatively to the centers of innovation and economic activity is felt throughout the economic base of the region, leading, in an unhealthy cycle, to the escape of the younger and skilled population, and leaving behind an aging population, without training, and that therefore cannot investment and innovation. The solutions to this problem include various approaches and economic and social visions, even related to spatiality and multiscale analysis linked with territorial and social cohesion. These are very important aspects that do not fit this essay but that can constitute an explanatory factor for some of the final results.

3. PRESENTING THE EXPERIMENT
To verify the perception of multiculturalism and human diversity of the children of Portalegre's county, we suggested that some kindergarten teachers asked their pupils to color in the postcard, without showing them the original painting.

Seventy children freely painted the cards. They were between 3 and 6 years old and of the selected kindergartens, 5 were urban ones (in the city of Portalegre) and 2 in rural parishes. 50% of children were male and the remaining 50% female. The ethnic diversity was almost non-existent, there was only a black child.

Here are some curiosities reported by the teachers: the black child did not paint the doll black but with white. When asked about her choice, her answer was that white skin was prettier. Whenever looking for the pencil to color the skin, children called the color "skin color" (light color). The demand for this pencil was intense and led to disputes, since all the children wanted to use the same color to paint the doll. Despite this preference, there was some chromatic diversity - redheads, darker or lighter brunettes, blondes and, of course, some random colors chosen by the younger children (these cards have not been validated – only the 70 painted with more realistic skin colors).

The results were the following: one doll was painted with dark skin color, two with yellow, but the teachers couldn't determine whether or not the yellow intended to represent Asian skin color. The black doll was painted by a 6 year old boy.

A short story, unfortunately real, was told by the teacher with the black girl who, as mentioned, painted the doll with "skin color" On Mother's day, last year, the children made postcards with the image of their mothers. This child refused to paint the mother as black. Even after the insistence of the educator, the child kept her position and took the gift with the "elaborated" image of the person who is undoubtedly the most important in her life!!!

As previously mentioned, the reality of Portalegre is of some isolation and, therefore, not very attractive to young people from diverse backgrounds. But in recent history, mainly after the decolonization post 1975, the city received, peacefully, many people from Africa, black and mix-raced. It isn't strange to any "Portalegre native" to see a black person or live "half walls" with other races. However, the general pattern and the culture is very "white". The population seems immune to diversity of cultures that, although residually, live in the city.

The children's responses mimicked the reactions of the adults to the coloring postcard, which raises the question of to what extent the different reality, multicultural and multiracial of today's world is transmitted to children. Globalization, which is an integral part of people's daily lives, through communication and information technologies, does not seem to pass from the screens of computers, televisions and mobile phones!

We are able to get excited with our soccer team which (thankfully) consists of black, white and mixed race players, Brazilian Portuguese naturalized, etc ... but we still cannot give our children a view of reality where the lack of "Standard" i.e., diversity, must be assumed as a model or gauge.

4. A FEW REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS
After this small experiment, what should be bothering us is not the children's responses to painting the card. The crucial points to reflect on are diverse and at various levels. That globalization we allow advance, without taking into account the fundamental values of the common life of the human species in this increas-ingly integrated world.

Globalization, like many other processes of change, is not intrinsically good or bad; depends on how we deal with the positive and how we mitigate the negative effects. Globalization has, like a coin, two faces, it remains to know how to properly polish the less brilliant face; for this, education for citizenship is one of the key instruments. While it is true that the whole process of change and integration of spaces has led us to a higher standard of life in the "Westernized" countries, it is also true that the positive aspects are not yet a global reality. It is up to teachers in all levels of the educational system to educate populations that are increasingly aware of diversity, so that the expansion is based on the benefits of diversity, not vice versa.

How to transmit values of racial plurality to children? What to change in ours pedagogical practices? Are we really preparing children for an increasingly complex and culturally interconnected and multifaceted world? What education for citizenship?

Too many questions to be answered through experiences like the one we have carried out. However, as educators and teachers, we can begin by transforming our practices in order to educate children to be prepared to value cultural, ethnic, racial or religious diversity. Having "well-trained" children and knowing how to deal with reality, we will have more intervening adults able to highlight and highlight the positive aspects of the changes and avoid the pitfalls that sometimes the rapid changes entail.

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